

## Meta-Organizations in the Making. A Multiple Case Study of Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organizations for Social Innovation

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### Abstract

There is a lack of research on the meta-organization creation process despite it being central to understanding this form of organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Valente & Oliver, 2018). In this paper, we investigate the process that underlies the creation of Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organizations (MSMOs). We explore MSMOs 'in the making' through a multiple case study of four meta-organizations with a social innovation purpose. We identify a three-stage MSMO creation process that takes place through the simultaneous occurrence of three major elements: the logic of action of MSMO members, MSMOs' evolving boundaries, and their organizing practices. We show that the MSMO creation process is based on the coordination, negotiation, and actualization of the practices of meta-organization members rather than on structural conditions. In addition, the MSMO creation process begins with the involvement of a leading organization, which decides to create an informal group of member organizations before the effective creation of a formal organization.

**Keywords:** *Meta-organization; Multi-stakeholder; Creation; Process; Social innovation*

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Organizations can develop different forms of collective action and cooperation, for example, through consortia, partnerships, clusters, and Meta-Organizations (MOs). To strengthen their legitimacy, they can also create Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organizations (MSMOs) to cooperate, share resources, develop new activities, or influence policies. These MSMOs, which are organizations composed of heterogeneous organizations, are required, encouraged, or facilitated by regulations. However, many member organizations have difficulty in developing or contributing to MSMOs.

The literature on MOs says little about the creation process, which shapes these new forms of action and cooperation (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018), particularly MSMOs. Research on MSMOs has tended to focus on definitions and typologies (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015), and authors who study the creation of MOs (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Valente & Oliver, 2018) have not investigated the case of heterogeneous member organizations. We suggest that the MSMO creation process challenges aspects such as the aim and contribution of each member within the MSMO.

Previous studies have mostly observed the creation process ex post, describing it after MOs have been successfully created. We chose to study MSMOs that are undergoing the creation process, which we call MSMOs 'in the making'. Our research question is what is the MSMO creation process?

More specifically, we observe 'territorial clusters of economic cooperation' (PTCEs – Pôles Territoriaux de Coopération Économique in French), that is, groups of colocated heterogeneous organizations, which are encouraged by French legislation to develop MSMOs with the aim of facilitating social innovation. PTCEs constitute a form of interorganizational cooperation, such as organized clusters (Lupova-Henry et al., 2021), ecosystems (Adner, 2017), and MSMOs (Berkowitz et al., 2017). We chose to analyze these territorial clusters as MSMOs because of the member organizations' desire to become formal collective organizations at the end of the process. Indeed, the PTCEs are only created when they are structured in a formal collective organization like an association or cooperative company.

We conducted a processual study based on grounded theory (Corley & Gioia, 2011) of four PTCEs 'in the making' to

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observe their creation process (coordination, negotiation, and development) as they took form. Our results establish a three-stage framework for the MSMO creation process based on three major elements: the logic of action of MSMO members, MSMOs' evolving boundaries, and their organizing practices. This process highlights the need for the prior existence of interorganizational activities, the preponderant role of a leading organization, and informal relations between members for the effective creation of an MSMO.

## Empirical and conceptual research on MOs

### *MOs and their different forms*

Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) introduce and define MOs as organizations whose members are organizations. Indeed, MOs have 'a hierarchy, an authoritative center, often represented by a special organization unit' (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p. 46). The authors describe the types of organizations that are generally involved in MOs and their logic of membership. Members are usually of similar types, have considerable autonomy and equality, can choose to join and to leave, and are not forced to become members, and the organizations involved remain independent (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). This shows that MOs represent a specific form of interorganizational cooperation.

While Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) contend that MOs are a form of organization, Gulati et al. (2012) consider MOs are a generic term that encompasses various forms of collective action. These forms can be categorized through two dimensions: stratification and boundary permeability. Cropper and Bor (2018) also observe different forms of partnerships in MOs: a hybrid form of formal collective action and networking or a form with transitions between different phases. This depends on the MO's membership, how it changes and influences the creation process.

Berkowitz and Dumez (2015) specify multiple types of collective action by MOs over a particular timescale: traditional MOs, specialized business MOs, and MSMOs.

Like Roux (2015) and Berkowitz et al. (2017), we view MSMOs as new forms of MOs, which embrace different types of organizations for developing collective actions without having to merge their identities. They are constructed at multiple levels as supra- or trans-sectoral affiliations. These forms all have in common the creation of a formal organization to support, facilitate, or develop activities, bringing together multiple stakeholders. We consider MSMOs to be a particular, stable form of MO.

While some authors have studied certain forms of MSMOs, such as sharing economy platforms (Berkowitz & Soucaud, 2019), ocean governance (Berkowitz et al., 2020), and civil society MOs (Laurent et al., 2019), they have studied them as

traditional forms. We suggest that characteristics such as stratification dimensions and boundary permeability (Gulati et al., 2012), the influence of heterogeneous members (Cropper & Bor, 2018), and the roles MSMOs play (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2015) should be added to their characteristics.

We define MSMOs as MOs composed of multiple stakeholders, with a partial organization form and the influence of heterogeneous members in their meta-organizing processes. Hence, the main objective of our study is to observe this particular form and highlight its specific features and influence on the creation process.

### *The MO creation process*

Several studies have researched the MO creation process without considering the case of MSMOs. However, we hypothesize that the MSMO creation process may be different to that for MOs, composed of homogeneous organizations, and scholars may ask how the MSMO creation process differs from the creation process described by Ahrne and Brunsson (2008).

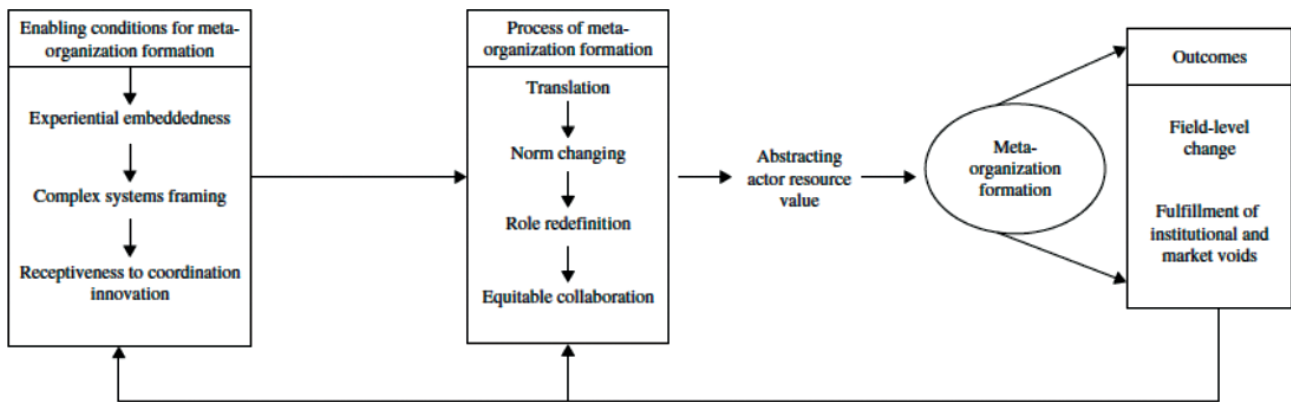
First, as MSMOs take simultaneous account of their different members, including public, private, social, and solidarity economy (SSE) and financial organizations, it is more challenging for an MO 'to work in the interests of all its members' (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p. 11). Furthermore, it is more difficult for an MSMO to 'argue for the interests of its members' (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p. 68) because it may have local authorities as members. Conflicting interests between members can hamper involvement in MSMOs, challenging the assertion that members 'increase [their] ability to recruit other members' (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p. 87).

Valente and Oliver (2018) studied the emergence and formation of MOs, as depicted in Figure 1.

This figure shows that enabling conditions and process formation pass through successive stages, from start to finish. We suggest that the creation of MSMOs may follow a more processual and nonlinear process because of the involvement of various organizations at different stages in the process.

### *Challenges for the MSMO creation process*

Based on empirical studies, the MO stream of research helps to explain the creation and management processes involved and their effects on the environment and members. However, most studies examine the MO creation process, which involves similar members. Our literature review found no specific features characterizing the creation and development of MSMOs, although the literature does add to our knowledge of MOs to some degree.



**Figure 1.** Meta-organizational formation, in Valente and Oliver (2018, p. 7)

We identified knowledge gaps, which require the study of MSMOs 'in the making'. For example, it would be interesting to know more about the influence of members in the creation process (Cropper & Bor, 2018), the presence of the meta-organizer in the creation process (Gadille et al., 2013), and MO's mission when multiple stakeholders are involved (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Berkowitz (2018), Valente and Oliver (2018), Corazza et al. (2021), and Berkowitz et al. (2020) emphasize the MO organizing process, in which there is a need to observe the creation process and the establishment of the organization's rules, capabilities, and governance.

By studying MSMOs, we can develop a better definition of them and can determine their current role in forming organizations. This also suggests the importance of studying MOs 'in the making' to highlight the creation process at work and understand it from the members' perspective. Following Katz and Gartner (1988), we call the MSMOs studied here as MSMOs 'in the making' to demonstrate our wish to study emerging MOs, that is, MOs in the process of creating their organizational properties.

## A multiple case study of four MSMOs

### A multiple case study as research design

We conducted a processual study of four MSMOs to observe their creation process 'in the making'. Our data collection began with an exploratory study before we chose four MSMOs 'in the making'. We followed the respective MSMOs as they were being created in an *ex ante* study.

Our study's unit of analysis was the process of organizing the MSMOs. This involved members' commitment and influence, action, coordination, and negotiation. We set out to describe the MSMOs' creation processes through a study of their members.

More specifically, we based our study on the following observation categories (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz & Cropper & Bor, 2018; Dumez, 2015; Valente & Oliver, 2018):

- Type of member organizations: diversity of member types, their identity, and autonomy outside the MSMO;
- Involvement of member organizations: their ability to choose to join and to leave, involvement of members, and influence of members;
- MSMO features: having organizations as members, equality of members, the presence of hierarchy and authoritative center; representation by a secretariat, collective solutions for specific problems, and management of stakeholders;
- Formation of MSMO: moving from actor-level needs to system-level goals, norm changing, role redefinition, and equitable collaboration.

### Empirical settings: MSMOs in the field of social innovation

#### 'Territorial clusters of economic cooperation': Definition and exploratory study

'Territorial clusters of economic cooperation' (PTCEs) are defined by Article 9 of the French Law on the Social and Solidarity Economy of July 31, 2014 as 'constituted by the grouping on the same territory of companies in the social and solidarity economy, [...] which associates with companies, in connection with local government bodies and their groups, research centers, higher education and research institutions, training bodies or any other natural or legal person to implement a common continuous strategy of sharing, cooperation or partnership in the service of innovative economic and social activities, socially or technologically, and sustainable local

development'. This definition describes how social innovation can be developed through the creation of MSMOs. Social innovation addresses social and solidarity issues relating to youth, individuals with disabilities, the elderly, employment, sustainable development, etc. French legislation states that these PTCEs can be created by any type of organization without the need for the formal approval of a local authority.

We can consider these PTCEs as MSMOs rather than clusters for several reasons. Following Ahrne and Brunsson (2008), Berkowitz et al. (2020), and Berkowitz and Dumez (2015), these forms of collective action have a legal form and different types of members. The members have autonomy, retain their own identity, and are free to join or leave. There is also equality between members, and they have trans-sectoral affiliations and a stakeholder management role.

In a preliminary study, we explored 12 MSMOs in France. These MSMOs all developed in the same area of France, but they neither were at the same stage of creation nor have the same legal form or the same type of membership.

This preliminary study allowed us to confirm that PTCEs can be studied as MSMOs. We base this assertion on advanced cases of PTCEs, three in number, where the group of members took a collective legal form.

#### Four MSMOs 'in the making' as case studies

The involvement of one of this paper's authors at the Institut Godin, which has been helping some MSMOs 'in the making' with their creation process, gave us ready access to cases. After interviews with the PTCE coordinators, we finally chose four cases out of the 12 considered during the exploratory study. These are Onshare, Meetin, Socialtrade, and Proxieco (the names are changed for the benefit of English-speaking readers).

We used the following terms in the interviews to make them relevant to the interviewees and the themes discussed:

- We used the term 'PTCE' (which was used by the interviewees themselves) as the empirical form studied,
- We used the term 'MSMO', which is used in the literature, as the theoretical object of our study,
- We used the term 'collective organization' to refer to the legal structure created by organization members to create an effective MSMO.

Although the MSMOs we chose are 'in the making', that is, not yet created, they can be linked to the MSMO literature (see Table 1). The specificities of these cases, which relate to the aim of social innovation, territorial embeddedness, and involvement of citizens, reinforced the trans-sectoral and multiple stakeholder principles of the MSMO.

We chose these MSMOs for several reasons. First, they were all still in the process of being created. Second, they

wanted to develop a legal way to link the member organizations together to create an MSMO. Third, the leading organizations that had initiated the MSMOs in the territory and managed the legal and financial dynamics were different, because of:

- their legal form: nongovernmental organization (NGO), private company, and local government;
- their history: they were already experienced, in the process of experimentation or not experienced;
- the number of leading organizations: one or multiple organizations.

Fourth, the four cases were at different stages of the MSMO creation process. One was beginning to have collective meetings (Meetin), one was beginning to develop SSE activities (Proxieco), facilitation of shared place (Onshare), and one was changing its legal form to include member organizations (Socialtrade).

#### Data collection

We used the following methods to study the four MSMOs 'in the making': in-depth interviews with MSMO coordinators, in-depth interviews with managers of member organizations, participation in steering committees, and documentary analysis of activity reports, meeting minutes, and summaries of presentations (see Table 2). We were also able to observe and participate in meetings, working sessions, and workshops.

#### Inductive analysis

We coded and analyzed our data using grounded theory, following Gioia. This method, described by Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 5), is designed 'to develop a set of well-integrated concepts that provide a theoretical explanation of the social phenomena studied'.

Our analysis of the data was mainly based on axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). We used the data structure of Corley and Gioia (2011) to discuss the results.

### Creation process for MSMOs 'in the making'

#### Onshare

##### Types of member organization in Onshare

Appendix 1 shows Onshare's timeline since its emergence. Onshare is led by a leading PTCE organization 'in the making'. This leading organization is an employment company that undertakes economic activities to promote employment. Onshare is composed of member organizations – shown in Table 3 – each of which is involved in different

**Table 1.** Description of PTCEs vis-à-vis MSMO literature

MSMO characteristic	Advanced PTCE	Onshare	Meetin	Socialtrade	Proxiéco
<i>Different legal forms of member organizations</i>	Companies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local authorities, citizens, and training bodies	NGOs, local firms, and local authorities	Local authorities, NGOs, and citizens	NGOs, local authorities, citizens, and companies	Companies, NGOs, local authorities, and training bodies
<i>Legal and economic involvement of members</i>	Members decide how to be involved in the governance and how to cooperate in economic activities	Member organizations participate in the development of economic activities	Member organizations participate in the development of economic activities	Member organizations participate in the development of economic activities and some participate in the collective governance	Member organizations participate in the development of economic activities
<i>Equality in decision-making processes</i>	NGO or cooperative organization as legal forms	Informal decision-making processes with PTCE members	Informal decision-making processes with PTCE members	NGO as legal form	Informal decision-making processes with PTCE members
<i>Autonomy in how members govern and create MSMOs</i>	Members choose organizing process	Coconstruction of PTCE by organization members	Coconstruction of PTCE by organization members	Coconstruction of PTCE by organization members	Coconstruction of PTCE by organization members
<i>Member organizations keep their autonomy and identity as independent organizations</i>	Depends on PTCE members' wish to be involved or not in all activities	Members' participation in some activities depends on their wish to be involved	Members' participation in some activities depends on their wish to be involved	Members' participation in some activities depends on their wish to be involved	Members' participation in some activities depends on their wish to be involved
<i>MSMO's aim is supra-sectoral</i>	PTCE members go beyond organizational activities to contribute to local sustainable development	Theme of city-center revitalization	Theme of sustainable and local transportation and food	Theme of sustainable and local transportation and eco-activities	Theme of sustainable and local transportation, food, youth, etc.

MSMO, Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organization; PTCE, Territorial Cluster of Economic Cooperation.

**Table 2.** Type and number of data collected

	Presence of coordinator during collective meetings	Interviews with coordinators	Internal observations	Interviews with stakeholder organizations
<b>Onshare</b>	2	3	1	7
<b>Meetin</b>	3	4	2	8
<b>Socialtrade</b>	7	5	2	12
<b>Proxiéco</b>	6	5	5	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>7 collective meetings</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>37</b>

MSMO activities, including sharing a workplace with other organizations, sharing a store, sharing an urban farm, sharing an SSE cluster, supporting merchants' activities, and meeting with companies.

### Involvement of member organizations in Onshare

Onshare began when the employment company was looking for a site in the city center and was joined by other NGOs, which also needed work premises. However, the leading organization piloting was considered to have 'no vision' for the MSMO. Organizations became involved in

Onshare because they 'already wanted to do something that would be fun' (coworking NGO manager). The employment company negotiated a formal agreement with the local authority for the premises. This favorable relationship, which was 'easier for the community' (employment company manager), was difficult for the other NGOs (coworking NGO manager and local art NGO manager). The organizations thought that having a shared workplace would facilitate 'links with people outside our professional sector' (coworking NGO manager), 'interpersonal relationships' (animal NGO manager), and 'creating partnerships' (local art NGO manager). Organizations become involved in Onshare activities and shared in them 'naturally' (local tourism NGO manager) by going to meetings.

### Features of Onshare

Onshare was launched with the aim to 'participate in the revitalization of the city center' (employment company manager). Member organizations pointed out that Onshare 'has formed around us' (animal NGO manager and coworking NGO manager). Member organizations had difficulties to agree on collective and shared goals for Onshare.

The leading organization was the only one that was in contact with all members of the PTCE. The coworking and local

**Table 3.** Organizations involved in Onshare

Organization	Involvement in MSMO	Participation in MSMO activities
Employment company	From the beginning, because of 'the possibility of setting up economic cooperation' (employment company manager)	Leads the economic activities and meetings
Animal welfare NGO	From the beginning, because of the possibility of creating an urban farm next to the shared premises	Leads the urban farm and participates in the SSE cluster
Coworking NGO	From the beginning, to find a 'location that suited us more' (coworking NGO manager)	Participates in SSE cluster and supports activities for merchants
Local art NGO	From the beginning, 'to have a place where independents can become more professional' (local art NGO manager)	Participates in SSE cluster and benefits from a shared store
Bike rental NGO	Because it was initially located in the shared premises	Participates in SSE cluster
Local tourism NGO	'To meet other NGOs' (local tourism NGO manager)	Participates in SSE cluster
Local authority	Provides financial resources for the launch of Onshare	Participates in SSE cluster
Local merchants		Benefit from support for marketing and marketplace activity
Local companies		Participate in meetings with leading organizations

MSMO, Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organization; SSE, social and solidarity economy; NGO, nongovernmental organization.

art NGOs admitted that they did not have enough time to share knowledge and develop partnerships with member organizations. External members of the shared workplace thought that monthly meetings of the SSE cluster would enable them 'to be known locally' by members (local art NGO manager).

### Formation of Onshare

The leading organization asked each NGO in the SSE sector to apply for French accreditation to formalize their commitment to the sector, with the aim of standardizing the SSE cluster.

Events created by Onshare members allowed them to 'strengthen each other' (local tourism NGO manager), but new activities were not created with the idea of creating complementarities or cooperation between members. For instance, the second shared store was created solely by the leading organization.

The Onshare creation process was largely informal. The only action the leading organization took to develop Onshare was that 'we oiled the gears and it looks like it's working' (employment company manager). In the same way, Onshare has no strategy, and member organizations prefer to develop it as 'opportunities arise' (employment company manager and coworking NGO manager). With regard to the decision-making process, the leading organization made important decisions without consulting the other member organizations. Most of the other member organizations accepted this arrangement because they had less time and fewer skills than the leading organization but some questioned this situation.

With regard to the structuring of Onshare, member organizations thought there was 'no need to formalize right now'

(bike rental NGO), but they offered some ideas about structuring rules and organization, such as 'having working sub-groups on certain issues' (local tourism NGO manager) or 'governance that's less pyramidal' (animal NGO manager and coworking NGO manager).

Finally, most of the member organizations did not consider themselves to be in a PTCE. Some did not understand exactly what a PTCE was (animal NGO manager, local tourism NGO manager, and bike rental NGO manager). Others thought it was better to 'really get together to do something' (local tourism NGO manager) and to communicate more (coworking NGO manager and local tourism NGO manager).

### Meetin

#### Types of member organization in Meetin

Appendix 2 shows Meetin's organizing process in the form of a timeline since its emergence. Meetin brings together many authorities and institutional organizations – shown in Table 4 – through various activities and meetings, such as steering committees, support for local entrepreneurs, transportation group, and food group.

#### Involvement of member organizations in Meetin

The creation of Meetin was driven by the local authority and a local institution involved in employment services within the framework of a European-funded project around entrepreneurship awareness. The employment institution began by making territorial assessments and studies of entrepreneurship and creating communication support. The local authority had already begun to support entrepreneurs and organizations, such as the agricultural high school and service NGO, which

**Table 4.** Organizations involved in Meetin

Organization	Involvement in MSMO	Participation in MSMO activities
Local authority	From the beginning, to develop and expand local and SSE entrepreneurship among citizens and local organizations	Leader in responding to a European call for projects. Overall leader of Meetin and steering committees as well as providing support for entrepreneurs and activity groups
Employment institution	From the beginning, 'to continue to exist (...) in the extension of our development priorities' (employment institution manager)	Correspondent to European calls for projects with the local authority. Provides communication support for presenting Meetin and territorial reports about entrepreneurship activities and territorial needs
SSE institution		Participates in Meetin steering committees and helps with structuring Meetin through regular meetings with coordinators
Supra-local authority	Because it is the institution that manages the EU funds granted to Meetin	Participates in Meetin steering committees
Employment local authority		Participates in Meetin steering committees
Agricultural institution		Participates in food group events and activities and in steering committees
Human service NGO	Creating new transportation in the territory with the help of the local authority	Participates in the transportation group and in steering committees
Agricultural high school	Creating a new food trade activity in the territory with the help of the local authority	Participates in the food group and in steering committees
County council	Through its local food service	Participates in the food group and in steering committees
Sub-local authority	Creating a new local food activity in the territory with the help of the local authority	Participates in the food group and in steering committees

MSMO, Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organization; SSE, social and solidarity economy; NGO, nongovernmental organization.

were setting up activities in the area. Therefore, members got involved in activity groups because of their previous relations with other local authority services and meetings with the leading organization to discuss common issues and topics that they could develop together. They also wanted to share ideas and activities because they 'shared the same values' (agricultural high school manager).

With regard to the organizational motives for Meetin, member organizations appreciated Meetin because they could 'share, exchange views, think together' (agricultural high school manager) and 'be assisted in the development of activity' (service NGO manager). Organizations had a variety of reasons for participating in Meetin. These included 'contributing to territorial development' (employment institution manager; county council manager; and agricultural high school manager), 'the completion of the projects that Meetin helps (...) on my activity' (service NGO manager).

### Features of Meetin

Steering committees were created for Meetin, as required by the financial agreement. At the beginning, the membership of these steering committees was largely composed of government authorities and institutional organization managers. From 2019, representatives of organizations involved in working groups, such as the agricultural high school or service NGO

managers, were invited to the steering committees. This change was appreciated by the organizations, which had concerns about Meetin. However, some member organizations thought these steering committees were too political and too remote (sub-local authority manager).

### Formation of Meetin

With regard to the Meetin creation process, only the two leading organizations knew what a PTCE was and wanted to develop it. They explained this lack of knowledge because 'today there's been no mention of PTCE' (employment institution manager and local government manager). For them, 'the logic to move towards a PTCE is the real aim of Meetin' (employment institution manager), and, to do that, it was necessary 'to go faster at the partnership level' (employment institution manager).

Finally, some members felt that the organization of Meetin was unclear and 'embryonic' (employment company manager). They also felt that their place in Meetin was unclear: 'I'm a structure that we support within the framework of Meetin. Afterwards I think that I'm also a partner' (service NGO manager and agricultural high school manager). This difficulty in seeing themselves as full members of Meetin stems from the fact that Meetin is informal: 'there's nothing deliberate' (county council manager and sub-local authority manager).

## Socialtrade

### Types of member organization in Socialtrade

Appendix 3 presents the Socialtrade case in the form of a timeline since its emergence. Socialtrade is an NGO that brings together various member organizations – shown in Table 5 – that are involved in a variety of activities and meetings, including the Socialtrade governing board, steering committees, support for local entrepreneurs, transportation group, and eco-activities group.

### Involvement of member organizations in Socialtrade

Socialtrade is unique in that the organizations were not members of the NGO because the organization's leaders were subscribers in their own names. As a result, depending on the organization, some shared products or services, while others were involved as citizens and individuals.

The thematic working groups met over a period of 2 years, with the involvement of different types of organizations, including institutions and local authorities, in activity thinking. However, the entrepreneurs of these activities were not invited to these discussions. During these groups, which, to begin with, were led by the local authority, members

'contributed their knowledge' (SSE entrepreneur and county council manager). These working groups were then led by Socialtrade, but they were 'quite divided' (mail company manager).

In 2019, the local authority stopped its funding, and individual members left the NGO because they were worried that the local authority would also create difficulties for their own organizations. Only three individual members continued to have links with the activities created by Socialtrade.

### Features of Socialtrade

Soon after its creation, it became necessary for Socialtrade to recruit a coordinator. The coordinator's role was to assist new entrepreneurs, lead working groups, and have meetings with local organizations to get them involved. Three of the NGOs got involved with Socialtrade because of the assistance provided by the coordinator and the support for their activity.

Governing board meetings regularly decided on the orientation and aims of the NGO. These meetings were not always formal: 'we operate at the office level to be quicker' (certified accountant). General meetings were held once a year and were attended by all the NGO's subscribers and beneficiaries. However, member organizations pointed to a lack of debate during these meetings.

**Table 5.** Organizations involved in Socialtrade

Organization member	Involvement in MSMO	Participation in MSMO activities
Executive officers of two employment companies	From the beginning of Socialtrade	Participated in the governing board of Socialtrade, and the transportation and eco-activity groups
Certified accountant		Participated in the governing board of Socialtrade and was still on the board in 2019
President of digital NGO	Created with the help of Socialtrade NGO	Participated in the governing board of Socialtrade and was still on the board in 2019. Also participated in transportation and eco-activity groups
SSE entrepreneur	From the beginning of Socialtrade and launched Socialtrade NGO	Participated in working groups from the beginning of Socialtrade and in the governing board of Socialtrade. Was still on the board in 2019
Local merchant		Participated in the governing board of Socialtrade
Director of vocational school	From the beginning of Socialtrade and launched Socialtrade NGO	Participated in the governing board of Socialtrade
Communication company		Socialtrade NGO subscriber
Entrepreneur	From the beginning of Socialtrade NGO	Socialtrade NGO subscriber and participated in working groups
Local authority	Launched the public consultation about meetings for economic development in the territory	Participated in working groups and invited onto the governing board but not a Socialtrade NGO subscriber
County council		Participated in a transportation group
Mail company		Socialtrade NGO subscriber and participated in transportation group
Local prefect		Relationship with coordinator of Socialtrade NGO
Neighborhood NGO	Created with the help of Socialtrade NGO	
Circular economy NGO	Created with the help of Socialtrade NGO	Participated in an eco-activity group
Transportation NGO	Created with the help of Socialtrade NGO	Became a subscriber of Socialtrade NGO

MSMO, Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organization; SSE, social and solidarity economy; NGO, nongovernmental organization.



The aim of developing a PTCE was to create 'a structure that could let us bring out activities related to the needs of the territory' (local authority manager). Socialtrade enabled territorial engineering, leading the creation of employment companies, and compelling cooperation (local prefect manager). Moreover, the city council manager, mail company manager, and local prefect manager were interested in Socialtrade because of the themes discussed to help vulnerable people and the possibility of developing activities and solutions for these issues. In this way, they shared the 'same values' (digital NGO manager). Socialtrade was interesting for citizens, and they wanted to be involved to support entrepreneurship and promote innovative activities in the territory (communication company manager and certified accountant).

## Formation of Socialtrade

Socialtrade stood out as a legal NGO created in 2016 because of the 'opportunity effect of the national and regional call for projects' (local authority manager). Although Socialtrade was not selected as one of these projects, it led to the creation of the collective NGO.

Some members thought it was necessary to reshape the strategy and organization to develop the economic sustainability of Socialtrade (employment company manager, communication company manager, and local authority manager). They highlighted these proposed actions because they thought that Socialtrade 'is fairly compartmentalized' (mail company manager). Moreover, they question the strategy for the creation and development of the PTCE: 'it's a cluster of ideas' (mail company manager, local authority manager, and SSE entrepreneur). They also question the 'internal functioning' (entrepreneur) of Socialtrade to allow economic development and structuring as a PTCE (employment company manager and local authority manager).

Other members felt that Socialtrade was heading in the right direction for creating a social inclusion chain (local prefect manager), assisting new entrepreneurs and developing new activities for social issues in the territory (circular economy, garage and digital NGO managers, and accountant). Turning Socialtrade into a cooperative company of collective interest (SCIC) was seen as 'a new objective' (garage NGO manager).

With regard to the role of the Socialtrade organizations, not all member organizations considered themselves to be full members of the PTCE. This was emphasized by the absence of a list of Socialtrade subscribers (local prefect manager). Some organizations also had 'double membership': they had shared skills and resources but were also involved in many working groups and general meetings. These organizations did not want to be members of the governing board because they did not see a role for themselves there (circular economy NGO manager). Finally, the local authority being a member seemed to

have been somewhat problematic due to local politicians lacking a good understanding of Socialtrade and its strategy (SSE entrepreneur).

## Proxiéco

### Types of member organization in Proxiéco

Appendix 4 depicts Proxiéco in the form of a timeline form since its emergence. Proxiéco brings together many organizations – shown in Table 6 – involved in several activities and meetings, including steering committees, transportation group, youth employment group, concierge service group, and eco-activity group.

### Involvement of member organizations in Proxiéco

Proxiéco emerged through the initiative of an SSE company, an organization that was already structured as a PTCE and working in a nearby territory. At that time, this leading organization had legal responsibility for Proxiéco. Four SSE NGOs and companies that knew each other as they had already run joint activities (education NGO manager) were initially involved in Proxiéco. For a year, these four organizations analyzed the needs of territory before presenting five themes at a public meeting at the beginning of 2018. It was at this time that the four organizations opened their group to local authorities. They then widened it to institutions and other local NGOs and companies (coordinator of Proxiéco). The four organizations were referred to as 'founding members', and the other organizations were considered to belong to 'the second circle where you have strong political or technical support' (local authority manager).

Organizations became members because they wanted to participate in territorial development, in line with their own logic of action, to develop economic strategies (education NGO manager and service NGO manager), extend their territory of action (SSE company manager), be involved in SSE development (local authority manager), and develop territorial cooperation (service NGO manager and employment company manager).

### Features of Proxiéco

Coordination of the working groups was split between the four leading organizations. Membership of these groups was composed of institutions and private organizations to highlight activities promoting 'the economy of proximity' (SSE company manager). These working groups were led by coordinators, employees of founding members of Proxiéco. They wanted to create and experiment with new activities based on the chosen theme. Regular meetings were organized to enable the sharing of ideas between organizations that were interested in them.

**Table 6.** Organizations involved in Proxieco

Organization	Involvement in MSMO	Participation in MSMO activities
SSE company (PTCE)	Co-launched Proxieco with the aim to disseminate PTCE creation	Participates and coordinates Proxieco through the involvement of an employee as coordinator. Involved in steering committees, support for local entrepreneurs
Employment company	From the beginning of Proxieco	Coordinates the concierge service group and steering committees through the involvement of an employee as coordinator
Service NGO	From the beginning of Proxieco	Coordinates the eco-activity group and steering committees through the involvement of an employee as coordinator
Education NGO	From the beginning of Proxieco	Coordinates the youth employment group and steering committees through the involvement of an employee as coordinator
Craft institution	From the beginning of Proxieco	Participates in steering committees
Supra-local authority	From the beginning of Proxieco as funding support	Participates in steering committees
Trade institution	From the beginning of Proxieco	Participates in steering committees
County council	From the beginning of Proxieco as funding support	Participates in steering committees
Local authority	From the beginning of Proxieco and facilitates the organization and creation of activities by providing resources	Participates in steering committees and the youth employment group
SSE institution	From the beginning of Proxieco	Participates in steering committees and the eco-activity group
Solidarity NGO		Participates in the transportation group and youth employment group and in steering committees
Cluster of NGOs	From the beginning of Proxieco	Participates in the youth employment group, concierge service group, and steering committees
Training NGO	To create a shared workplace of Proxieco	Participates in steering committees
High school		Participates in the eco-activity group and steering committees
Employment NGO		Participates in the transportation group, youth employment group, and steering committees
Garage NGO	Started as a beneficiary of Proxieco's human service in the creation of the garage NGO	Coordinates the transportation group and participates in steering committees

MSMO, Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organization; SSE, social and solidarity economy; NGO, nongovernmental organization; PTCE, Territorial Cluster of Economic Cooperation.

Proxieco aimed to be 'a kind of incubator for organizations' with the advantage of networking and recognition in the territory (garage NGO manager and service NGO manager). Proxieco also enabled the development of a 'PTCE [which] was a very interesting avenue for social innovation' (employment company manager).

To assist these working groups in creating new activities, the SSE company also helped local entrepreneurs to create activities related to themes such as supporting the garage NGO entrepreneur. This entrepreneur was involved in the transportation group to help facilitate the creation of new activities as well as the involvement of organizations in this concrete activity. Thereafter, the lead of the transportation group was shared between the SSE company and the garage NGO manager.

### Formation of Proxieco

Member organizations identified the SSE company as 'the head of the network and with a still vertical organization' concerning

Proxieco (local authority manager and coordinators of Proxieco). To advance the Proxieco organizing process, member organizations suggested they should 'have the resources to be able to take greater responsibility for the person they deal with within Proxieco' (education NGO manager).

Several members thought it would be necessary to formalize Proxieco legally with a business model and clear governance (SSE company manager). Other member organizations suggested that 'the next step will be the legal structure, the physical structure, and the resources to coordinate these structures' (education NGO manager; SSE company manager; employment company manager; and coordinator of Proxieco).

With regard to the PTCE's strategy, most of the members emphasized that it was unclear (employment NGO manager) and not visible (local government manager and service NGO manager). Member organizations reported the complexity of strategizing as practice and based on opportunities (cluster of NGOs manager and SSE company manager). To develop and create the PTCE, organizations suggested that the strategy

should concentrate 'to show concrete things quickly' (cluster of NGOs manager).

Finally, with regard to the role of members, all the organizations explained that their role was not precisely defined, but they tried to attend meetings and help to create Proxieco. The leading organizations played a significant role in coordinating thematic groups and in meeting up to discuss the strategic vision and the creation of the PTCE.

## Discussion of the MSMO creation process

### Understanding the MSMO creation process

The data structure related to the creation process of MSMOs in the making (detailed in Table 7) has four aggregated dimensions: (1) the creation process of the MSMO through time, which specifies three stages in the MSMO creation process, (2) the logic of action for joining and participating in the MSMO, highlighting the different reasons why member organizations join and how their membership evolves through time, (3) evolving boundaries of the MSMO 'in the making', showing the MSMO's specific role, the relations between organizations and their relations with the MSMO through time, and (4) organizing practices for the creation of the MSMO, which is related to structuring, governance, and strategy practices at the MSMO level through time.

The first aggregated dimension is the overall scheme through time, which encompasses the other three dimensions as interlinked simultaneous elements in the creation process. The first-order concepts were taken from quotes about and observations of MSMOs 'in the making', and the second-order themes and dimensions have been built as abstraction from inter-related first-order concepts.

### The MSMO creation process through time

The first aggregated dimension observed in the MSMO creation process represents the whole creation process through time. This shows that MSMOs 'in the making' are neither multi-stakeholder organizations nor MOs at any point during the creation process. We can highlight three stages in the MSMO creation process through time.

The first stage starts with the desire of one organization to develop cooperation in its territory. This stage corresponds to the emergence process because of 'its novelty, its association with a new set of relations, the stability and boundedness of these relations, and the emergence of new laws or principles applicable to this entity' (Hodgson, 2000). Hence, leading organizations for this new MSMO 'in the making' must develop relations with other organizations with the aim of getting them to join it. In this first stage, emergence is individual because the leading organization must convince other organizations and

obtain funding to facilitate the launch of the MSMO and its creation process.

The second stage begins when the leading organization succeeds in recruiting new organizations to the MSMO 'in the making'. All the members are involved in working groups and collective action for social activities and achievements. The organizations are also divided into two groups: those involved in the organization of the MSMO (the first group) and those that only participate in working groups (the second group). This division does not prevent action for accomplishments or activities for social innovation. In this stage, the leading organization continues to play a central role in the creation process because it provides funds and makes decisions, etc. At this point, the MSMO creation process can stop or become complicated if it is difficult to recruit members and/or to fund the development of social activities.

Finally, a third stage is necessary for moving beyond these divided groups and creating the MSMO. All the organizations we interviewed in our study, particularly those in the second group, highlighted their difficulty in clearly understanding the strategy, governance, and decision-making of the MSMO 'in the making'. The creation of MSMOs, thus, takes place through the organization of collective spaces for governing, developing strategy, and making decisions for the whole MSMO.

### Members' logics of action for joining and participating in MSMOs

The whole MSMO creation process is influenced by the members' logics of action, which can evolve through time. An organization's decision to become a member is logically driven, first and foremost, by self-interest. However, self-interest is rarely considered as an issue, as the emphasis is on developing a common vision for the territory. This self-interest logic in the MO leads us to view MOs as responding to social needs in the territory. Within these MSMOs 'in the making', we observe a grouping of multiple stakeholders who want to develop social innovation and corporate political strategy (Ferrary, 2019), notably through implementing a broader form of governance based on co-responsibility between member organizations for social innovation aims (Acquier et al., 2011).

In the four MSMOs 'in the making' presented here, the organizations were seeking to participate in a MO to facilitate discussion, decision-making, and mutualization of activities among them. This has echoes of communities of practice (Wenger, 2005), particularly through the principle of cross-learning between organizations. As we can see, this logic of action is present in the second stage of the creation process, where the aim is to share ideas, resources, and knowledge among members, especially in workshop groups.

**Table 7.** Data structure

First-order concepts	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leading organizations play a central role in giving ideas, direction, vision</li> <li>- Leading organizations capture values and funding to develop MSMO</li> <li>- Leading organizations seek stakeholders in MSMO creation</li> </ul>	<b>Individual emergence of MSMO</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two separate groups appear in the creation process: first group (including leading organizations), based on similarity between members, and second group, larger than just the members</li> <li>- Groups are also separated in participating in activities related to the MSMO creation process: the first group participates in governance, while working groups enable participation by all invited organizations</li> <li>- Groups have different functions: governance facilitates formalization of MSMO, while working groups are involved in creation of new activities</li> </ul>	<b>Divided groups for MSMO activation</b>	<b>1. MSMO creation process through time</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First group gradually involves second group in governance and committees, depending on willingness of second group to become involved</li> <li>- The new challenge is based on creation of MSMO: adaptation of collective motives and creation of equal and collective governance</li> </ul>	<b>Collective group for MSMO creation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discovery of MSMO 'in the making' because of wish to transform the economy and the territory</li> <li>- MSMO activity themes based on responding to the needs of citizens</li> <li>- Member organizations want to develop social activities</li> </ul>	<b>Social and territorial innovation as an individual logic</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participation in workshop thematic group and MSMO 'in the making' to share knowledge with other member organizations and individual aim of 'gaining power'</li> <li>- Sharing ideas and activities between member organizations without shared actions</li> </ul>	<b>Communities of practices to share knowledge and get to know other member organizations</b>	<b>2. Members' logics of action for joining and participating in MSMO</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizations become more involved because of common interest in realization of activities for territorial development</li> <li>- Organizations contribute creatively and cooperatively to address territorial issues and create new activities</li> <li>- Partnership and commercial relations between organizations with the aim to create activities</li> </ul>	<b>Creative communities co-create activities with other member organizations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leading organizations are engaged and involved</li> <li>- Leading organizations have a central role in meeting organizations</li> <li>- Involvement in search for resources and coordination of groups</li> </ul>	<b>MSMO as a new activity for a leader</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presence of similar organizations in the first group of members in creation process and leading organizations seek to strengthen similarity between organizations (values, labels)</li> <li>- Dissimilar organizations are present in the broad creation group but are seen as full members of MSMO by the first group</li> <li>- Dissimilar organizations are followers, unaware and skeptical about MSMO creation process and see themselves as non-members or distant members</li> </ul>	<b>MSMO as a group of similar members with blurred boundaries</b>	<b>3. Evolving boundaries of MSMO 'in the making'</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integration of all organizations in MSMO creation process (working groups and governance) with formalization of membership</li> <li>- All organizations see themselves as full members of MSMO and leading organizations agree with equality between members</li> </ul>	<b>MSMO as an enlarged group of members</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategy defined by leading organizations but unclear for members</li> <li>- Strategy is led by opportunities and meetings, 'with no vision'</li> <li>- Organizations become partners of leading organizations in a new activity to create</li> </ul>	<b>Only the leading organization knows about and is involved in launch practices</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gradual involvement of members in governance with formalization of paths for involvement in MSMO</li> <li>- Differentiated participation for member organizations between first and second group</li> <li>- Member organizations are aware of goal of MSMO but observe unclear governance and strategy practices</li> </ul>	<b>MSMO formalization practices by the members</b>	<b>4. Organizing practices for creation of MSMOs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structuration of a MSMO with formalized governance, strategy and rules, shared between all members</li> <li>- Creation of a legal form of MSMO between member organizations, including resources for the MSMO itself</li> </ul>	<b>Structuration practices of MSMO itself</b>	

MSMO, Multi-Stakeholder Meta-Organization.

In the third stage of creation, member organizations seek to turn the vision and ideas into new creative activities 'if the object of their interactions is creation, the attractor who initially brings them together concerns the shared expertise and interest in a specific area' (Dubois, 2015, pp. 34–35). These activities are cocreated by member organizations, with the aim of addressing the needs of the territory.

These observations lead us to consider how logics of action evolve for member organizations as part of a collective action process within MSMOs. This part of the process is seen as 'a social construct', and this collective action only works when 'relatively autonomous actors, with their resources and capabilities, have created, invented, instituted [...] for the accomplishment of common objectives, despite their divergent orientations' (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977, p. 13). Crozier and Friedberg (1977) add that the organization is complementary to the action because the organization corresponds to the framework in which the action is developed. We can assert that the creation of MSMOs follows a process like collective action, where organizations, driven by individual and collective logics of action, try to organize themselves to create a common vision. David et al. (2012, p. 31) add the importance of conceiving collective action simultaneously 'in an individual exchange logic (contracts, remunerations, etc.) and in a social logic (interests and shared language, etc.)'.

### **Evolving boundaries of MSMOs 'in the making'**

The MSMO creation process is also greatly influenced by the evolving boundaries of the MSMOs. Organizations involved in MSMO activities are not inevitably full members, and MSMO activities and membership are not fixed for all the processes studied.

In the first stage, we found that leading organizations play a prominent role in the MSMO creation process. The leading organization has economic and relational power through having most of the links with other organizations involved in the MSMO 'in the making'. The organizations involved are partners in this new activity, with a second role in the MSMO creation process and creation of activities.

In the second stage, the MSMOs are built with organizations that are similar in nature, making it possible to develop faster and on solid foundations before opening out to other stakeholders, including those that are less similar. The stakeholders integrate more quickly and deeply (as they have frequent meetings and are involved in MSMO governance) if the leading organization is of a similar type. Stakeholders do not all have the same legitimacy to get involved in the governance of the MSMO 'in the making'. All the MSMOs 'in the making' in our study chose to create governance among similar organizations: SSE organizations, private organizations, and local authorities.

Boundaries are also blurred at this stage because of the representation of the MSMO membership in the creation process. Although some stakeholders do not see themselves as members, leading organizations see them as current and full members of the MSMO 'in the making'.

In the third stage, the progressive formalization of membership and participation of all the organizations in working groups and governance turns the MSMO into an enlarged group of members. At this stage, all the organizations see themselves as full members of the MSMO, with responsibility for and involvement in the MSMO creation process and in the development of new activities. Equality between members is also facilitated by organizing practices. However, the creation process of some MSMOs comes to an end because of a lack of equality between members.

### **Organizing practices for the creation of MSMOs**

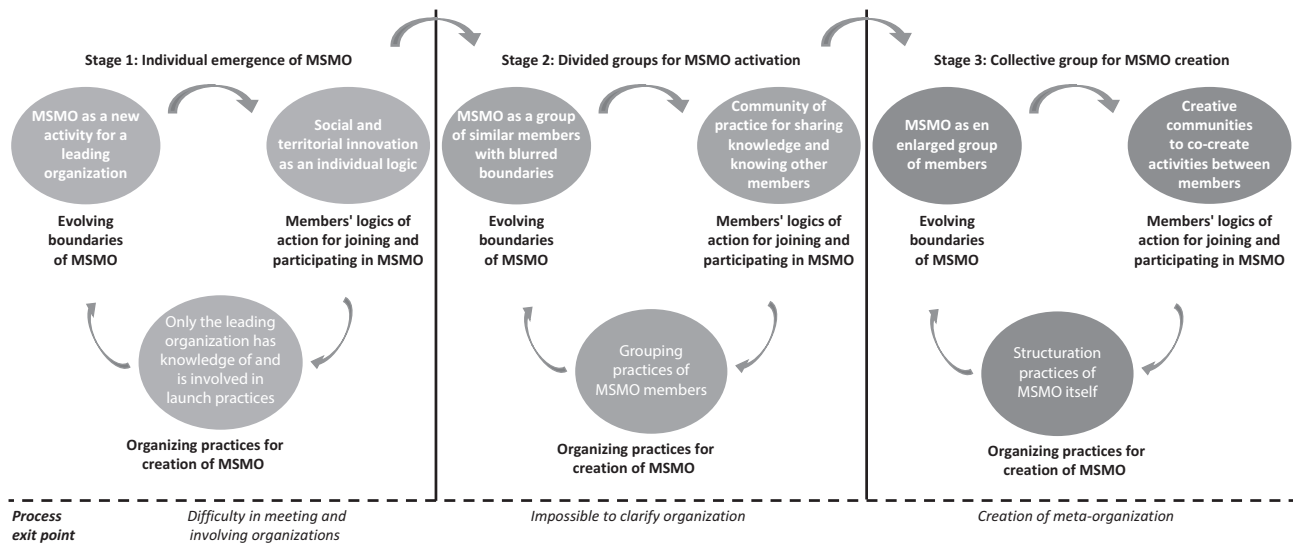
The organizing practices developed to create an effective MSMO constitute the last influence identified in the MSMO creation process. Three stages can be highlighted in the development of these organizing practices, depending on which level the creation of the MSMO is at. In the first stage, the MSMO is based on launch practices, which are led fully by the leading organization. This MSMO 'in the making' is seen as a new activity for one leading organization. Hence, the MSMO's strategy is based on opportunities and meetings with organizations in the territory, which again are led by the leading organization.

In the second stage, the MSMO is seen as an informal grouping of members. Organizing practices are based on the involvement of members in different MSMO activities, but without any formalization of their involvement. This produces divided member groups depending on the level of their involvement and participation in activities. However, the level of stakeholders' involvement influences the multi-stakeholder logic of MO, particularly when various stakeholders are not involved in the governance. The risk here is that these organizations will lose interest and no longer wish to be involved in the MSMO.

In the third stage, the MSMO is seen as a structured MSMO. Organizations are clearly involved, equally and democratically, in all the MSMO's activities and processes. The MSMO's governance, strategy, and rules are formalized and shared between all the member organizations. This stage allows the MSMO to be created, with a legal form and specific resources at the MSMO level. If MSMOs in the making fail to structure an equal and democratic MSMO, the creation process ends.

### **A framework for the MSMO creation process**

Our study of the creation process of four MSMOs 'in the making' enables us to make some theoretical contributions to the



**Figure 2.** The creation process of multi-stakeholder meta-organizations

field of MOs, and more specifically MSMOs, with regard to their creation process. We present a three-stage MSMO creation process, influenced by three major elements: the logic of action of MSMO members, MSMOs' evolving boundaries, and their organizing practices. These major elements each have three development stages. In Figure 2, we suggest a framework with three loops to depict an interconnected, inter-influenced process in the MSMO creation process. To better understand the nonlinear framework, we drew three different schemes, each representing a different stage in the process. In each stage, we highlight the exit point of the process, which leads to failure or success in creating the MSMO.

In the first stage – individual emergence – leading organizations have the central role because of their involvement and their own logic of action. The organizing practice consists of recruiting members. Hence, the creation process may stop at this stage if the leading organization has difficulty in enrolling member organizations.

If it succeeds, the creation process moves to the second stage (involving divided groups), where the involvement of members is not equal and depends on the legal form of member organizations. This situation produces divided groups of members. However, a divided group can develop activities and achievements in working groups. At the end of this stage, there are differences in member organizations' links and involvement in organizing practices. It is, therefore, necessary to move beyond this stage and to clarify organizing processes.

The third stage (involving the collective group) then develops with the involvement of all the members in discussions about governance and strategy. This involvement fosters shared and creative activities between members. Members can now set up equality of governance, a collective strategy, and

cooperative experiences. By the end of this stage, MSMOs 'in the making' have become formal and collective organizations.

Using this framework, we can identify which stages in the creation process the cases studied are at. First, we can show that Onshare is at stage 2 of the MSMO creation process as it has blurred MSMO boundaries and represents a community of practice between members of similar types. Questions, therefore, arise about the presence of an informal grouping between members and the need to better formalize the practices of the MSMO.

Second, Meetin can be considered to be at stage 2 of the MSMO creation process because there are sharing practices between organizations and divided groups participating in the MSMO and because of the lack of understanding of the MSMO's strategy by some of its members. Member organizations are also questioning their role and those of other organizations as well as the cocreation of new activities and formalization of MSMO.

Third, Socialtrade was at stage 3 before it exited the MSMO creation process. Socialtrade had developed an enlarged group of members and some MSMO structuring practices. However, the members did not cocreate activities and questioned the equality and democracy of the MSMO organizing practices. These challenges and the departure of the principal founder resulted in failure of the MSMO creation process.

Fourth, Proxiéco is at stage 3 of the MSMO creation process because of the presence of an informal group, experimentation with cocreated new activities, and the desire to enlarge the group of members with additional members in the governance process.

This three-stage framework highlights that the MSMO creation process is unstable and requires a balance between the

roles and involvement of member organizations, members' logics of action, and organizing practices for the MSMO 'in the making'. The successful creation of an MSMO requires members with equal levels of involvement and powers, chosen collective logics of action for developing activities, and a structured organization based on democratic and equal governance and a collective strategy. We can, thus, argue that the practices observed in the MSMO creation process influence the achievement of the common vision as well as the multi-stakeholder logic of the MSMO and the involvement of each member organization.

Although this process may seem linear, we observed that different stages can evolve simultaneously, that is, Proxiéco launched the MSMO at the time when members began to get involved. In the same way, some MSMOs are structured before the creation of thematic working groups and the involvement of members. However, we suggest that our proposed framework is more typical of the MSMO creation process.

Finally, it is important to identify the role of the institutional environment during the MSMO creation process. We believe that, despite the PTCE legal definition, MSMOs in the making seem to rethink their desires and aims during the creation process. However, we can see the importance of the institutional environment in the funding of the MSMO creation process in relation to the role of local authorities as MSMO member organizations.

### **Contributions and limitations of the MSMO's creation process framework**

This research prompts a new dialogue in the literature on MSMOs and more broadly on MOs. First, the framework specifies how an MSMO is created. Unlike Ahrne and Brunsson (2008) and Valente and Oliver (2018), we suggest that the creation of an MSMO is first driven by a single organization, which involves similar and then multiple stakeholders in working groups and in the governance of the MSMO. In the same way, the MSMO and MO creation processes also specify the noncreation of a common identity (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008) between multiple stakeholders because of MSMOs' blurred boundaries.

Second, the research highlights a dynamic creation process, led by the logics of action, outcomes, and practices of organizations rather than the presence of enabling conditions before MO formation (Valente & Oliver, 2018). Indeed, our study highlights that the MO creation process is largely organic. Therefore, we suggest that MOs should be conceived as collective actions between member organizations (Gulati et al., 2012), which lead to the creation of a structured organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008).

Third, we identify a new motive for organizations to create an MSMO: the development of sustainable activities and outcomes. This new motive is rarely evoked in previous studies on MO activities. Indeed, authors of previous studies insist on the

functions of advocacy, lobbying, and structuring dialogue between multiple stakeholders and vis-à-vis the environment (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Berkowitz et al., 2020).

Fourth, we contend that, in addition to the work of Berkowitz and Souchaud (2019) who suggest a hybrid approach to governance, we observe in our cases that the creation process of MSMOs was pushed forward by very pragmatic decisions on organization or business model aspects of the project.

Thus, we suggest that the creation of the MSMOs is not an end or a goal in itself but a way to structure and co-manage shared social activities between the multiple stakeholders. These suggestions lead us to question whether this creation process is specific to MSMOs or whether it is due to the ex ante study that we carried out and/or the activities developed by the MSMOs studied.

Our study opens several research avenues to take this analysis further. These include studying other and more advanced MSMOs such as MOs in less supportive institutional contexts, carrying out a study over a longer period of time and studying the process at the sub-organizational level. Such studies would enable validation of the MSMO creation framework and its use in multiple cases and situations. A further avenue of research concerns the study of relationships between organizations at the territorial level and/or with a social aim (Dechamp & Szostak, 2016) rather than the relationship of organizations vis-à-vis the MSMO. To do this, it would be interesting to get closer to the cluster and ecosystem literatures to complete the MSMO's creation process.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, we suggest that the MSMO creation process is based on the coordination, negotiation, and realization of member organizations' practices and involvement, with the leading organization playing a predominant role in the first stage of this creation process. The second stage focuses on activating the MSMO, facilitated by an informal group involved in the MSMO creation process. Finally, this informal group needs to be formalized.

We also show that the MSMO creation process enables the development of activities and themes about social issues in territories. This result legitimates the interest and commitment of the French state in MSMO forms. However, we stress the importance of member organizations themselves wishing to be involved in the creation of MSMOs rather than being required to create them because of the predominance of their organizational involvement throughout the creation process.

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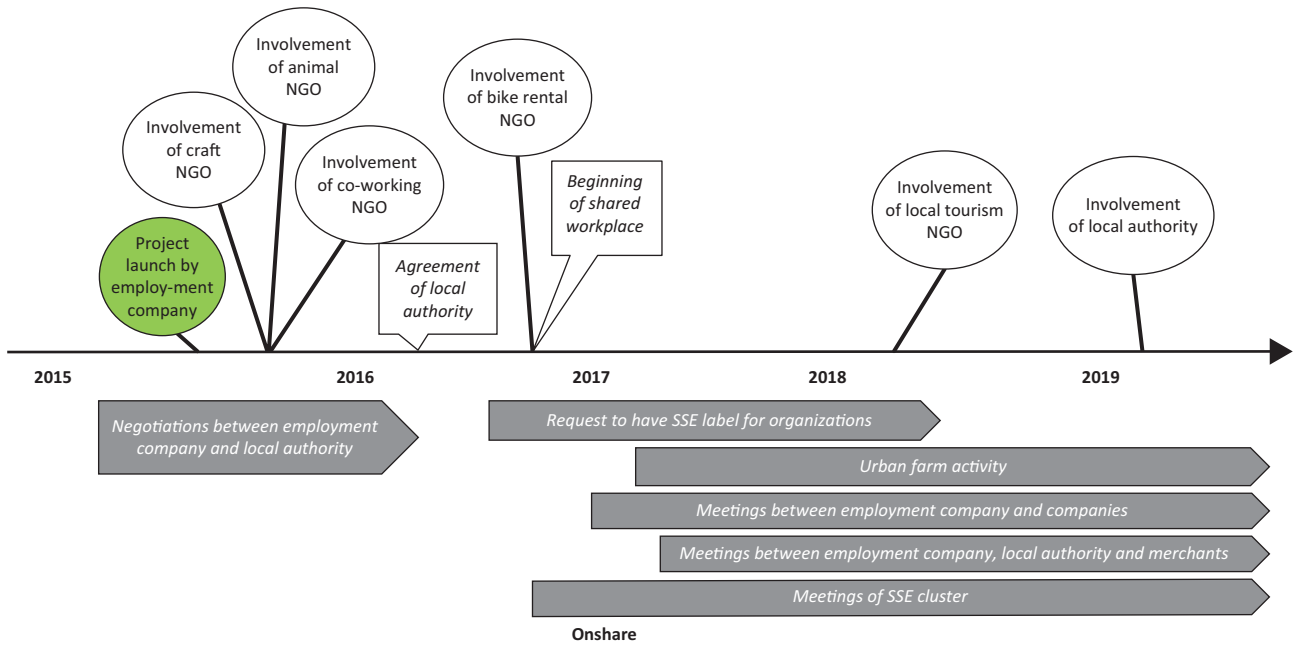
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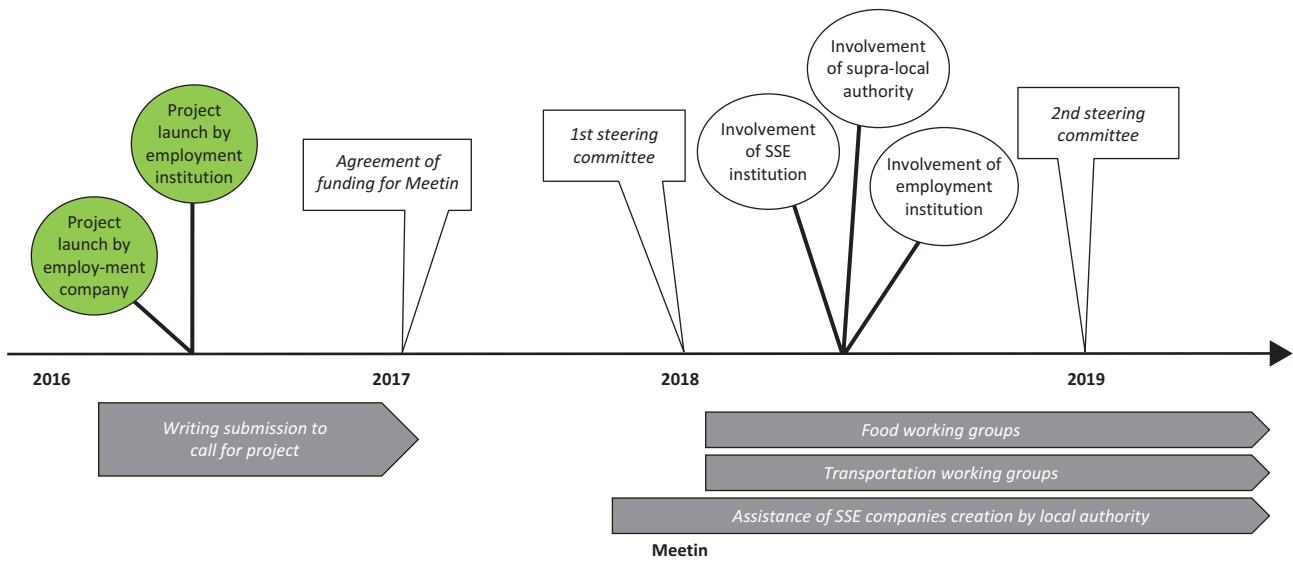
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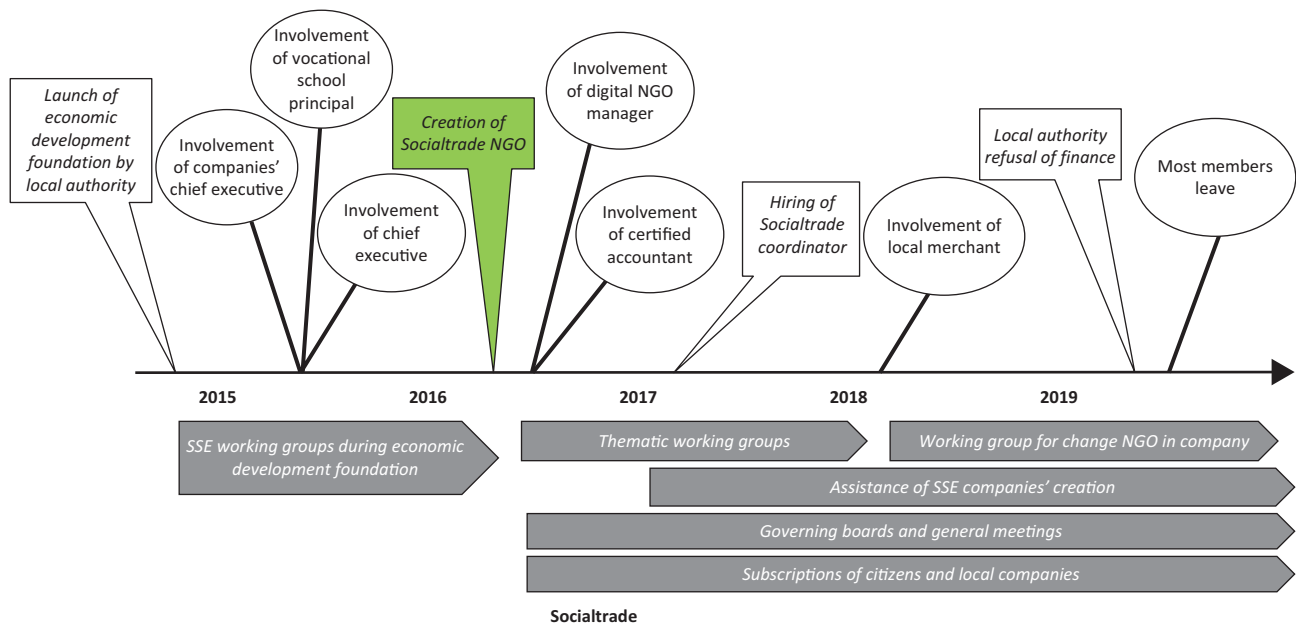
## Appendix



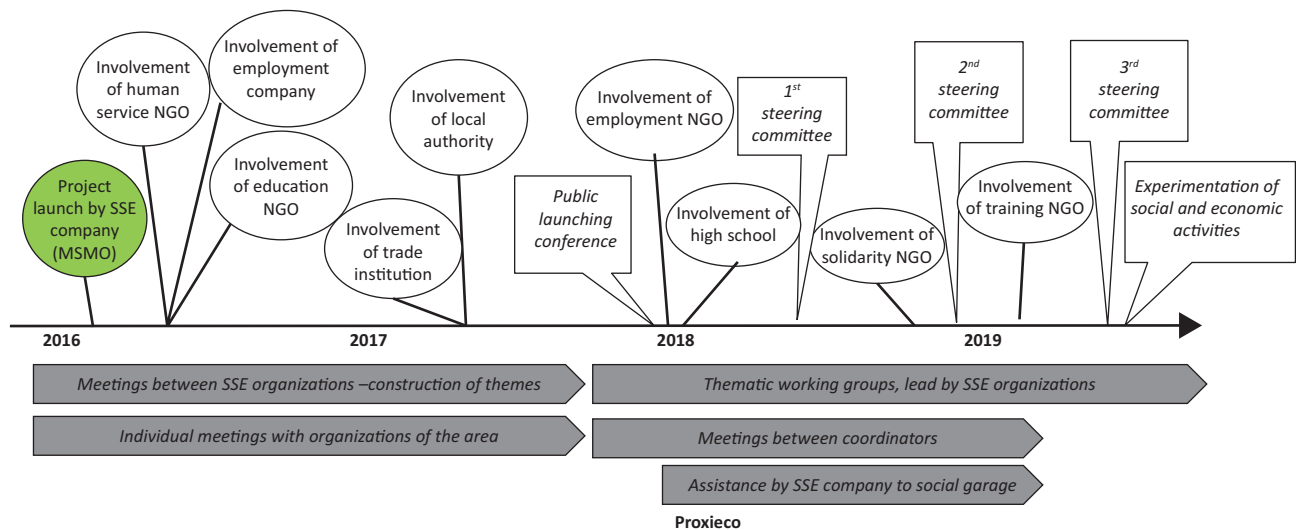
**Appendix 1.** Onshare – timeline form



**Appendix 2.** Meetin – timeline form



**Appendix 3.** Socialtrade – timeline form



**Appendix 4.** Proxieco – timeline form